

Bangon 2.13.10 - Green Renovations

Canadians want to see progress in addressing important environmental issues such as climate change, air quality and protection of our natural resources. The good news is that Canada's professional new home builders and renovators are helping homeowners take a leadership role on the environmental front.

In both new home construction and home renovations, Canada's housing sector is setting the standard for environmental performance. Greenhouse gas emissions are being cut. Energy efficiency is continuously improving. Indoor air quality is advancing. And we are using our natural resources more prudently.

If you are looking to renovate your home, no matter the size and scope of your desires, there are many things that can be done to “green” it, making your home more energy-efficient and environmentally responsible. A professional renovator can explain the possibilities and help you decide on the best choices for your project.

- An energy audit of your home is a good place to begin. It will provide a precise snapshot of your home's energy performance and opportunities for improvement, such as replacing the furnace with a high-efficiency unit, upgrading windows or “draft-proofing” your home. There may be energy-efficiency measures you can build into your current renovation plans, or you may decide to expand your plans to take advantage of rebate and incentive programs offered by governments at all levels. The audit should be performed by a licensed energy advisor. For information on grants and how to find an energy advisor, go to www.energiguide.london.ca or www.oeenrcan.gc.ca and follow the ecoEnergy Retrofit links.
- If your mechanical systems (i.e. heating, cooling or ventilation systems) are getting old, this may be a good time to replace them. Today's new high-efficiency systems provide a more comfortable living environment, use less space and will save you money from day one. There is a whole range of new types of systems on the market, such as on-demand water-heaters and combination hot water/heating systems. Renewable energy systems (e.g. solar and geothermal) are also becoming increasingly popular.
- Upgrading your windows can make a big difference to your energy bills and make your home much more comfortable. New doors and upgraded insulation can further improve your home's performance and comfort. If door and window replacement is beyond the scope and budget of your home, caulking and sealing to reduce air leakage can still deliver a noticeable improvement.
- The air in your home is an integral part of the living environment. Installing a heat recovery ventilator will keep the air clean and avoid moisture problems.

Use low-off gassing paints, glues, cabinets, counters, and so on, to minimize the toxins that are emitted into the air, and hard-surface and easy-to-clean flooring to avoid dust accumulation.

- Environmentally responsible products and materials cover an immense range, from wood from sustainably managed forests to carpeting made from recycled pop bottles to locally produced building components (less energy, fewer emissions in transportation). Choosing the most appropriate green materials may sometimes be a matter of trade-offs, determining which environmental aspects should be given most weight, in addition to price, performance, durability and other considerations.
- Water conservation is an essential part of greening your home. As possible, replace old toilets with low-flush or dual-flush units (you may be eligible for a rebate), and install new low-flow faucets or flow-restrictors. Beyond these relatively modest measures, you may want to talk with your renovator about rainwater collection for inside and outside water usage and grey-water capture for recycling water.
- If your renovation involves exterior work, decking or landscaping, there are many things you can do to reduce the environmental impact. Window awnings and plantings of trees and shrubs to shade your home in the summer will reduce the need for air-conditioning. Light coloured surfaces for driveways and walkways absorb less heat than dark surfaces such as asphalt. Composite decking materials are easy to work with, durable and save on wood, paint or preservatives. Cut down on watering by landscaping with native and hardy plants and using plenty of mulch.

For more helpful information on the process of planning a successful renovation, check www.lhba.on.ca and for a downloadable copy of the Homeowners' Guide to Green Renovation, (12 pages detailing a three-step planning process applicable to any renovation project) go to www.chba.ca